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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001841

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SUBJECT: THAILAND: EAP A/S CAMPBELL'S MEETING WITH PHEU
THAI LEADERS AND SUPPORTERS

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a July 21 meeting with the opposition Pheu Thai party leaders and supporters, East Asian and Pacific Affairs Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell urged more open dialogue among political actors and peaceful reconciliation to Thailand's political conflict. Chaturon Chaiseng, a banned politician from the former Thai Rak Thai Party, criticized Thailand's Constitution and the unfair application of legal mechanisms that had forced the People's Power Party from power. Chaturon predicted that a sense of injustice in Thai people would result in more violence before political reconciliation could be achieved. Both Chaturon and Noppadol Pattama, former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Thaksin's lawyer, encouraged more U.S. engagement in Thailand and public statements to press for progress towards more genuine democracy. End summary.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

¶2. (C) EAP Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell, accompanied by the Ambassador and EAP Special Assistant Mark Tesone, met July 21 with Pheu Thai Party (PT) leader Yongyoot Wichaidit, party leaders, and supporters at PT headquarters. A/S Campbell highlighted USG commitment to the bilateral relationship with Thailand and interest in Thai political reconciliation. Noting that Thailand's political conflict was a domestic issue, A/S Campbell asked how the political conflict could be resolved peacefully via democratic means. Chaturon Chaiseng, a banned politician who was prominent in the now dissolved Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party and a leader of the reds, characterized the return from the 2006 coup as unlike past restorations to democratic governments in Thailand. Democracy had not fully returned since the People's Power Party (PPP), the successor party to TRT, had won the December 2007 election but its members were no longer in power. Chaturon said he had attended the meeting to illustrate the unfair treatment of those who opposed the aristocrats and the military.

CONSTITUTION CALLED ILLEGITIMATE

¶3. (C) Chaturon criticized the removal of Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat as Prime Ministers in 2008 as flawed because they had been removed from office via mechanisms established by the 2007 Constitution. The public referendum that had approved the charter in August 2007 was not legitimate as it had been conducted under the backdrop of

martial law in many areas and had passed under threat of the military's Council for National Security imposing a constitution of its own design if the referendum had failed.

¶4. (C) Chaturon objected to collective punishment for political parties for violations of election laws by members of the party as dictated under the Constitution. This deprived a vast number of politicians of political rights, including Chaturon himself. The dissolution of TRT and the banning from political activities for five years of the executive board was erroneous because the Court had been appointed by the military, Chaturon claimed. Political reconciliation would be difficult to achieve before the Constitution was amended in order to repair flaws that allowed for prejudicial application of punishment mechanisms.

VIOLENCE PREDICTED

¶5. (C) Chaturon said that the course of the political developments from 2006 up to now had left him worried that more violent conflict was in store for Thailand. Many Thais felt that the punishment imposed on Thaksin-loyalists had been unfair. Overwhelming victories by PT in recent by-elections in northeastern Thailand underscored sustained strong support for the reds and wide-spread disappointment among the Thai public in political developments, Chaturon said.

¶6. (C) PT would win the next general election but Constitutional mechanisms would be exploited by aristocrats

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to dissolve the party and overturn the vote of the people, Chaturon said. This bias would result in violence. Chaturon said that the reds had been compelled to organize public rallies in order to prevent undemocratic actions. The red demonstrations had succeeded by sending a strong message to those in power.

¶7. (C) Thaksin had changed the rules of Thai politics, Chaturon claimed. Voters were now better educated about political choices, more aware of their rights, and better able to make accurate judgments of government. Chaturon asserted that Thai people were unhappy with the Abhisit Vejjajiva government as it was ineffective, inefficient in governing, and afraid to travel in many areas of the North and Northeast.

ENCOURAGING POLITICAL RECONCILIATION

¶8. (C) A/S Campbell highlighted U.S. interest in and hopes for resolution of Thailand's political conflict but stressed that USG did not want to interfere in Thai domestic affairs. That said, A/S Campbell asked for the PT's thoughts on what the international community could do to assist Thailand to peacefully and democratically resolve the political conflict. Chaturon argued that the best course of action for the U.S. and others would be to make strong, clear statements that Thailand's political system should be more democratic. Elections were not the final word in democracy as recent events had shown that the vote of the people could be overturned.

¶9. (C) Chaturon said that while there was a thin line between constructive engagement and harmful intervention, the international community could play a supportive role by speaking out via well-designed comments on Thai politics. Discussions with leaders of the government and the military could also assist in combating undemocratic tendencies.

PROMOTING DIALOGUE

¶10. (C) A/S Campbell stressed that an essential component of

democracy is open and honest dialogue among all actors in the political spectrum. While Thai politics were vigorously carried out, this dialogue seemed to be missing from the political debate. The U.S. hoped that room for such dialogue could be found soon. Noppadol Pattama, Thaksin's lawyer and former Foreign Minister, expressed hope for more discussions between U.S. officials and members of opposition. Noppadol said he was disappointed by USG actions after the coup as the U.S. had not communicated its objections strongly enough. Forceful statements on events after the coup, including court judgments that had gone against TRT and PPP would have helped, as would have canceling exercises with the Thai military.

¶11. (C) Noppadol urged increased U.S. engagement in Thailand, including pushing the Abhisit government to call for an early election. Regardless of when the next election was held, the U.S. should consider sending election monitors to Thailand, Noppadol said. The U.S. should also make it clear to the government and to the military that another coup would not be tolerated by the U.S.

HONDURAN CASE USED AS COMPARISON IN THAILAND

¶12. (C) Chaturon and Noppadol praised U.S. actions following the removal of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya from office; a proactive stance by the U.S. in Thailand would benefit not only the nation but the region as well. Noppadol called for the U.S. to consistently apply the principles followed in the Honduran case. Both Thais and Hondurans shared the right to choose their political representatives, and the U.S. should look to follow the same course of action in Thailand as had been carried out in regard to Honduras.

¶13. (C) A/S Campbell said the U.S. fully supported democratic principles and appreciated the views expressed on the political situation. U.S. officials would continue to engage

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a wide range of actors on the state of politics in hopes of assisting Thailand, a long-time ally and friend, in achieving political reconciliation.

¶14. (U) This cable was cleared with the EAP Front Office.
JOHN